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COLLABORATIVE PROGRAMME EVALUATION: THE APPROACH AS APPLIED IN SOUTH AFRICA

Introduction

This paper describes the Improving Educational Quality (IEQ) Project's experience in adopting a collaborative approach in conducting programme evaluations with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that provide in-service training (INSET) to unqualified and underqualified teachers in disadvantaged schools in South Africa. These NGOs provide a variety of services which include the training of teachers in learning-centred methodologies and materials development and usage, to address pressing needs to improve the quality of education at the classroom level. The purpose of these impact evaluations was to establish whether the teacher training programmes offered by these organisations were associated with improved instructional practices and learner participation in classes.

Historically, NGOs in South Africa have focused primarily on service delivery to address imbalances and disparities in educational provision and quality. With delivery being the focal point of their operations, systematic monitoring and evaluation activities either did not exist, were done on an ad-hoc basis, or were left to external evaluators. This scenario is currently changing. Large numbers of NGOs are becoming aware of the importance of research, monitoring and evaluation activities which have direct implications for their sustainability and sometimes mere survival. Donor agencies, both national and international, are placing greater pressure on their grantees to produce evidence that shows programme impact beyond outreach information. And, as NGOs seek to establish partnerships with new national and provincial departments of education, such evaluation data is essential to establishing areas of potential cooperation--areas where NGOs can show that they are making a difference.

Evaluations of NGO teacher training programmes are usually conducted by external evaluators (often non-South Africans) who are commissioned by donor agencies to determine whether their funding makes a difference to target groups and/or whether funding should continue. In the past, the objectives of the evaluations have not included building research and evaluation capacity of NGO staff. The IEQ Project differs from the manner in which external evaluators traditionally operate, in that, evaluations are conducted by an IEQ team of South Africans, with NGOs involved in determining the goals of the evaluation and throughout the design and implementation of the evaluation. Thus, the development and strengthening of research and evaluation capacity of NGO programme personnel are important facets of the evaluation process.

IEQ's Collaborative Approach to Evaluation

Collaboration between the IEQ and the USAID-funded South African Basic Education Reconstruction (SABER) grantees in conducting programme impact evaluations has been characterised by negotiation, reciprocity and empowerment. This means that both the IEQ and the NGO personnel interacted as active participants in the evaluation process, albeit at different operational levels. The nature of the collaborative approach to evaluation with NGOs reflected the goals of the IEQ Project, which are:

- To conduct impact evaluations of SABER grantees' products and services that influence instruction and learning at the school and classroom levels
- To strengthen grantees' capacity to establish and maintain monitoring and evaluation systems for individual projects
- To strengthen SABER grantee staff expertise in educational research and evaluation methodology
- To facilitate professional linkages between SABER grantees and the educational research and development community outside of South Africa.

Collaboration is underpinned by the professional development strategy which is linked to institutional development. In other words, as the capacity of the NGO staff members to conduct formative and impact evaluations is developed on a personal level, these skills can be transferred to various functions and activities of the organisations as well. For example, people who have gained/developed skills in monitoring and evaluation will be in the position to review and refine their organisation's existing monitoring and evaluation efforts.

Steps in the Collaborative Evaluation Process

IEQ's approach to working with NGOs to implement evaluation methodologies involved collaborative working relationships at each stage of the evaluation process:

- initiating task structure and establishing relationships;
- identifying NGO information needs which may be gathered during the assessment;
- working together to construct a design that fulfills NGO information needs;
- forming teams of IEQ and grantee staff to develop data collection instruments that remain with the NGO for project use;

- preparing for data collection;
- conducting site visits together and collecting data;
- analysing data;
- report writing; and
- developing strategies for utilisation of the findings to influence policy and improve practice.

In the next section, each of these steps in the process of building capacity while designing and conducting impact assessments will be explored in detail. For each step, tasks will be identified and issues which arose will be discussed.

Step 1: Initiating Task Structure and Establishing Relationships

A preliminary task of the IEQ was to create a structure and process for working with NGOs that would ensure both the effective development of impact evaluations and, at the same time, build the capacity of grantees to conduct their own evaluations in the future. Individuals were chosen to represent the NGOs who were key persons in their respective organisations, who knew the training programmes, who could make decisions, and who could serve as liaisons between IEQ and the organisations. These representatives were typically not the directors but rather those who were directly responsible for the development and implementation of the training programmes.

Sensitivity to personal concerns, organisational needs, knowledge and skills bases with regard to evaluation was crucial in adopting a collaborative approach. There were different levels of monitoring and evaluation skills evident in the NGO personnel--differences not only by organisation, but also amongst individuals within organisations. Before focusing the evaluation it was necessary to recognise and address, where possible, participants' concerns, needs, and knowledge and skills bases.

At an initial meeting with these NGO representatives, the purposes of the evaluation were discussed, the collaborative approach outlined, and the sharing of responsibilities explained. Time was spent in establishing trust and rapport, as NGOs' previous experiences with evaluation had often been threatening. Moreover, NGO personnel worked for competing organisations, each offering inservice teacher training programmes and competing for scarce donor resources; hence, it was also necessary for them to become comfortable with one another. At this first meeting many questions were raised about the "real" purpose of the evaluation and what would "really happen". IEQ researchers tried to answer them honestly and openly, emphasising the collegial nature of the task. A key factor in establishing trust and rapport among competing organisations was a commitment on the part of the IEQ team not to compare the evaluation results of

the various organisations in any type of report. Rather, the potential collective impact of NGOs in the field of inservice teacher training through a series of reports was viewed as carrying more weight with government departments of education than any individual programme results.

Roles of IEQ researchers and NGO representatives were discussed and agreed upon. It was agreed that as evaluation specialists, the IEQ would take the lead in providing the structure and technical base for the development and implementation of the study. NGO representatives would provide leadership and expertise in identifying intended programme outcomes and, by participating throughout the design and implementation process, ensure that designs and instrumentation fit the context and the needs of the NGOs. They would also assume responsibility in logistical matters and participate as data collectors (and/or identify people in their organisations to do so) along with the IEQ researchers. The roles of the IEQ and NGO personnel were necessarily complementary, requiring a good deal of mutual respect and trust.

Each of four IEQ researchers and one consultant were designated as primary contact persons for organisations and, as a follow up to the first meeting, visited the NGOs at their organisations to answer questions, calm fears, and establish a working relationship.

At the second meeting, a consultant observed that a relationship characterised by trust and rapport had already been established among the NGO personnel and the IEQ team:

> *Participants arrived at the workshop eager to begin working. No concerns were expressed related to the study. It was evident that trust and rapport had developed between participants and "their" IEQ team member, probably as a result of the follow up visits and collaboration with team members since the last meeting. All members quickly became involved, even some who felt unsure during the first meeting. Concerns among participants seemed to have shifted from "self" concerns to concerns about how to inform others about the study in a positive way, to gain their support. As they worked toward consensus on a variety of issues, this was a recurrent theme.*

Step 2: Identifying Information Needs

It was agreed that the impact of each programme would be assessed at the classroom level. Since no pre-test data nor pupil achievement test data existed, it was further agreed that measures of impact should be observable differences in teachers' instructional practices and learner participation. The instructional practices and learner participation in classrooms of teachers who had received INSET training would be compared to classrooms where no such enhancements had yet been introduced.

Several design worksheets were developed by IEQ researchers to determine the information and instruments that would be necessary to assess programme impact. These

worksheets consisted of open-ended questions to facilitate NGOs' reflections about the goals of their programmes, expected outcomes, key evaluation questions they would like to answer, types of instruments that could be used to gather information, samples that could be used, and products expected by the organisation. Sample questions included:

What would you like to find out from this evaluation?

As a result of participating in your teacher training programme, what would you expect to see teachers doing differently in the classroom?

What would you expect to see learners doing?

How could this information be obtained?

Which group(s) in your organisation could collect this information?

Working through the design process with the assistance of the IEQ team, NGO personnel discussed the questions as a group. They then took them back to their organisations to discuss with other members of their organisations and complete.

Step 3: Constructing Designs

NGO representatives returned to the next meeting with the design worksheets for their impact evaluations. The IEQ team was surprised at the effort and amount of detail that they had put into their "homework". These initial efforts were important not only to gather information needed for the designs but, perhaps more importantly, to get NGO personnel to "think assessment" and to build commitment to the process. The activity also allowed IEQ researchers to assess informally where different individuals were in their understanding of concepts such as "impact," "sample," and "evaluation questions."

At this meeting, major decisions were made regarding the evaluation design and related issues. IEQ team members worked with the NGO personnel to identify each programme's intended outcomes, operationally define indicators, determine the bases for comparison, the size and characteristics of the sample, types of instruments needed, data collection training and methods, and how data would be analysed and reported. Since it was apparent that intended programme outcomes were similar for the six NGOs, it was decided that they would work together on a core design which could be tailored to individual needs. It was emphasised that there would be no comparisons of individual programmes--an essential understanding if competing organisations were to work together on evaluation.

The process involved a discussion facilitator presenting issues requiring a decision, or an issue would arise from the group. The facilitator presented various options and some advantages and disadvantages of each. Participants reflected on the implications for their

organisations, offered perspectives based on the organisation and the context in which he/she worked, and explained the rationale. NGO representatives retained an independent stance and were not hesitant to disagree with one another. The facilitator solicited input from all. Decisions were made by consensus, which sometimes involved a compromise suggested by a participant or the facilitator. The facilitator provided a "check" that the agreed-upon procedures were technically sound. At times it was decided that more information was needed, and decisions were postponed until the NGOs could obtain information or consult with their organisations. Examples of decision points related to the evaluation design and the paths to consensus are included to illustrate the use of the collaborative approach.

- *Levels of Training*

Teachers who participated in inservice training had various amounts of training. Programme co-ordinators saw this as an important variable, since their programmes were developmental in nature. IEQ researchers saw the need to define these various levels of training for the purposes of comparison in the study. Operational definitions were then developed for high, medium and low-trained teachers so that teachers with various levels of training could be compared. These trained teachers would also be compared with teachers who had not received INSET training, called the "untrained" group. This comparison was necessary because there was no baseline data on teachers' instructional practices and learner participation before teachers attended training programmes provided by NGOs.

- *Internal/External Comparison Groups*

After a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of internal and external comparison groups, grantees agreed that they would try to get access to untrained teachers at other schools. Some programmes operate school-wide, and all encourage sharing among teachers, so for these programmes, an internal comparison group was not a viable option. Therefore, grantees agreed that the comparison group would consist of teachers in other schools who had not participated in the INSET programme or a similar programme.

- *Sample Selection*

The importance of using a representative sample was discussed. Other variables that could account for teachers' instructional practices besides level of training were discussed, including types of schools--farm schools, rural (distinct from farm schools), and urban; level of formal education, and years of experience. Participants agreed that teachers selected should represent a variety of types of schools, levels of education and years of experience; and that the each of the training level groups should include approximately equal proportions of the different variables, to keep the groups "equal."

- *Use of Proximal Measures*

How would one know if training "made a difference?" NGO representatives confirmed that no baseline data was available on student performance levels prior to teacher training that would allow such a comparison. Within the scope of the study, it was decided that teachers' instructional practices and learner participation would be suitable proximal measures of student learning. While it was recognised that teachers' instructional practices and student participation cannot be equated with student learning, they were considered far better indicators than how "happy" a teacher felt about a workshop--the more often used indicator of "success" of training programmes.

- *Announced or Unannounced Visits*

When presented with the options and rationales for announced and unannounced visits, the group responded that visits had to be announced: "That's the way we do business around here!" Unannounced visits were considered for a second visit, after teachers could be informed that observers would be coming "sometime," but with the uncertainty about the scheduling of school events in remote areas, the group decided that announcing visits and scheduling them in advance would be much more productive.

As they discussed design issues and worked toward consensus, participants carefully considered the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches and based their decisions on what would be best for the study and services to teachers, and logistically feasible, not ease or convenience. They demonstrated commitment to the process and also considered the needs of people in their organisation and their clients (teachers, students, and parents) in making their decisions.

Step 4: Developing Instruments

To ensure that the evaluation measured outcomes directly related to the programme's goals and objectives, discussions were held individually and collectively about what the programmes were trying to achieve. Programme objectives for each of the six NGOs focused on the use of learner-centred activities in the classroom. Inservice training attempted to take the focus off of the teacher as dispenser of information and "put the light on the learner" in terms of an interactive process of teaching and learning. This approach also requires a new role for learners as active participants in constructing and using their new knowledge.

The process of developing a classroom observation instrument involved NGOs describing the "ideal" scene in a classroom of a teacher who was implementing a programme exactly as the inservice programme developers envisioned. Participants brainstormed what the teacher would be doing; what students would be doing; and what the classroom learning environment would look like and feel like. These were recorded on chart paper and then combined into a number of components of teaching and learning in a learner-centred environment:

Use of a Variety of Teaching Strategies
Use of Materials by Learners
Use of Materials by Teacher to Enhance Learning
Grouping of Learners
Learners Work in Groups
Critical and Creative Thinking Activities
Questioning Skills
Learners Asking Questions
Teacher Feedback to Learners
Use of Language to Improve Learner Understanding
Opportunities to Learn

This core group of 11 components was used by each of the NGOs; in addition, individual NGOs had the option of adding components to measure areas of interest that were peculiar to them. All components were in line with findings of research on effective teaching over the last decade (Ellett, Loup & Chauvin, 1991; Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991).

Working together, INSET programme co-ordinators and IEQ researchers further articulated the components in terms of specific behaviours of teachers and learners, with intended outcomes identified as the "ideal" on a rating scale. Other less acceptable teacher and learner behaviours were identified and described along a continuum for each component, with the least acceptable variation on the opposite end of the rating scale.

This is an example of the rating scale (for classes where learners are grouped):

Component: Learners Work in Groups

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Groups of learners discuss problems, questions, and activities	Groups of learners with limited interaction	Only one or two learners in a group interact	Learners sit in groups but work as individuals

Description:_____

_____

_____

In addition to making a rating decision, observers described what was happening in the classroom and provided examples.

A critical incident in the emergence of trust between the NGOs and the IEQ team, and among NGOs, was the inclusion of a component in the instrument on which all NGOs expected to rate poorly: Learners Asking Questions. When the idea for this component

was first suggested by an NGO representative, there was some initial hesitation about including it. While getting learners actively involved is a goal of all of the programmes, asking questions represents a dramatic shift in the role of learners in South African classrooms and of children in society in general, where they are expected "to be seen and not heard." After discussion, however, all NGOs agreed that if this was important, it should be included. While they predicted (correctly) that ratings would be low in this area, they saw this as an opportunity to begin monitoring improvement and reaffirmed among themselves that if this process was to be meaningful, "window dressing" could not be a part of it.

A variety of other instruments were developed with NGOs, including a demographic profile sheet; questionnaires and interview protocols for teachers, head teachers, and facilitators who work with teachers; and a classroom environment and resources checklist. With the assistance of an IEQ team member, each organisation decided which combination of instruments would be appropriate to collect the kind of data needed. A common core of items from the various instruments was used by all of the NGOs, including a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods.

Both the content of the instrument and the development process, then, relied on the NGOs working closely with the IEQ researchers. This was considered essential if instruments and monitoring and evaluation processes were to be used by NGO organisations in the future.

Step 5: Preparing for Data Collection

In addition to arranging classroom visits and handling the logistics of scheduling and permissions, NGO representatives and others from the organisations were trained as data collectors. To prepare for classroom observations, participants viewed videotaped segments of classroom teaching and learning in South African classrooms and made rating decisions, then discussed their ratings and rationales in small groups and reached consensus. This process was followed until participants felt comfortable with the observation instruments and rated videotaped teaching segments consistently. Directions were reviewed for the questionnaires and teacher profile sheets, and tips on interviewing were provided, e.g., how to make the interviewee feel at ease, how to get more information, use of verbal and non-verbal communication.

Step 6: Visiting Sites and Collecting Data Together

IEQ researchers and NGO personnel trained as data collectors visited schools and collected data together. In completing the observations, observers watched an entire lesson for each teacher (30 minute minimum), focusing on the teacher and learners, in order to observe learner engagement, learner interaction with the teacher and other

learners, and learning equity (e.g., gender equity in opportunities to participate in class activities). For each component, observers rated the teacher on the classroom observation rating scale and provided rationales for assessment decisions. They also completed a classroom environment and resources checklist.

Direct observations of classes taught by teachers with different levels of training, including no training, allowed comparisons to be made between the groups, to determine the impact of training. Observers were careful to explain to teachers that they were evaluating the inservice training programmes, not the teachers themselves.

Questionnaires and interviews were also completed during the school visits. An attempt was made to "triangulate" the data by gathering the perceptions of teachers, principals, and NGO teacher trainers/facilitators.

Step 7: Analysing Data

Classroom and interview data were analysed using a variety of descriptive and inferential statistics to determine if there were differences between teachers with different levels of training. While the IEQ researchers took the lead in the computer analysis using SPSS (due to time pressures and the lack of experience of grantees in data analysis), the input of the grantees was invaluable in explaining the results. What might have looked puzzling as numbers on paper became very plausible when one understood the context in which it was found. For example, in a comparison of teachers by levels of formal education, differences were not found for teachers in most of the programmes. That is, it did not seem to matter if teachers had achieved matric, completed a teacher training college program, or had a diploma. Differences were related instead to level of NGO teacher training. While surprising at first, the finding could be explained when one considered that the formal education received was Bantu education--notably inferior, lacking in resources, and typical of education for the majority disadvantaged population during the apartheid years in South Africa.

While statistical significance was used to determine the strength of relationships between variables and the probability that the observed differences were "real," practical significance was determined through discussions with NGO personnel. The question of practical importance of the finding to the organisation was a consideration equally important to the statistical significance of the finding.

Step 8: Report Writing

The impact evaluations for each NGO organisation were documented in an individual technical report which was reviewed by all stakeholders. Again in this step, IEQ researchers took the lead. NGO representatives had input in all phases of the report, however, and wrote selected segments, particularly those related to programme

descriptions and expected outcomes at the classroom level, and how the findings might be utilised for programme improvement. The involvement of NGOs also served as a reminder "check" on IEQ researchers to communicate in user-friendly terms, avoiding jargon. In addition, graphs and simple tables were used to visually represent the findings.

NGO personnel were central to the review process. They took draft reports back to their organisations and reviewed them with colleagues, teachers, and teacher trainers; asked questions; and made suggestions that would enhance the presentation. In some cases the questions and suggestions led to further analysis of interesting and/or surprising findings, and subsequent reporting of new findings.

Step 9: Developing Strategies for Utilisation to Influence Policy and Improve Practice

Results of the impact evaluations provided a large amount of information about teaching and learning in classrooms that can be used by a variety of stakeholders--INSET NGO organisations, policy makers, potential donors and teacher training colleges. As collaborators in the evaluation process, NGO organisations "own" the data, understand the findings, and can better use the evaluation findings to enhance practice and influence policy decisions. This aspect will be discussed in more detail in a later section on utilisation of findings.

The nine steps to collaboration described above comprise the impact evaluation process, with IEQ and NGO involvement described at each step along the way. A summary of the steps and their outcomes, which led to the succeeding steps, is included in Table 1.

Table 1
Collaborative Evaluation Process

Step 1:	Initiating Task Structure and Establishing Relationships
Outcome:	Working group of NGO representatives; beginning of a team
Step 2:	Identifying Information Needs
Outcome:	Essential information for designing the evaluation
Step 3:	Constructing Designs
Outcome:	Evaluation design blueprints
Step 4:	Developing Instruments
Outcome:	Evaluation instruments
Step 5:	Preparing for Data Collection
Outcome:	Trained data collectors and schedules
Step 6:	Visiting Sites and Collecting Data Together
Outcome:	Classroom data
Step 7:	Analysing Data
Outcome:	Data organised, interpreted, and conclusions/implications drawn
Step 8:	Report Writing
Outcome:	Completed impact evaluation reports, with suggestions for utilisation
Step 9:	Developing Strategies for Utilisation to Influence Policy and Improve Practice
Outcome:	Results presented jointly (IEQ and NGOs) to programme staff and teachers; national and provincial departments of education; cross-sector exchange to discuss and plan next steps for South Africa

It was discovered in working through this process that although the two groups collaborated, this did not mean that the effort was shared equally at each step. At times the IEQ researchers took the lead, most evidently in data analysis and report writing, while involving the NGOs. At other times, particularly in data collection, the NGOs tended to take the lead in scheduling and/or conducting observations and interviews. In other steps, e.g., design and instrument development, the IEQ researchers facilitated discussions which led to joint agreement on outcomes. In utilisation, both the IEQ and NGOs have made initial strides in using the data to inform policy decisions, and the NGOs have used the results to take a closer look at their programmes as well.

Opportunities and Challenges of a Collaborative Approach to Evaluation

There are number of opportunities and challenges that need to be considered when deciding to adopt a collaborative approach to evaluation. The following are some of the opportunities, or advantages, of adopting such an approach:

Opportunities

- *Hands-on learning by doing*

NGO personnel learn about programme evaluation by being actively involved in all the phases of the evaluation process. Group meetings and workshops on evaluation methodology and processes which focused on the IEQ/NGO INSET impact evaluations provided NGO personnel with opportunities to learn by doing. As each IEQ team member worked closely with a contact person (sometimes a team) from the NGO, learning could be assessed on an on-going basis.

- *NGOs know their programmes and contexts*

A collaborative approach to evaluation also affirms the NGO personnel's experience and practice-based knowledge. Assistance from people working in the field in terms of sample selection and access to schools for data collection is invaluable. From this perspective, the NGO personnel's experience with regard to logistics and access to schools is extremely important.

Collaboration with NGOs also required them to reflect about their programmes and their tasks in implementing the programmes. For example, in developing instruments, NGO personnel were crucial because they were able to express what their programmes were intended to achieve by their objectives. Indicators for each objective were identified which were then developed into measures in an instrument. The instruments that were developed for the study were enriched with input from NGO personnel.

Another important component of collaboration is that the NGO personnel know the contexts in which they work. They clarify and/or verify perceptions on contextual issues that external evaluators could be holding. This is especially important if the evaluator in a non-South African.

- *NGOs understand the schooling contexts*

NGO staff have a good understanding of the context of schooling. This is important for providing the contextual background to the data collected and interpreting and explaining the findings. Collaboration with the NGOs provided the IEQ team with an understanding of the context in which NGOs operate. This knowledge was especially useful in trying to explain what a particular finding meant to that programme. For example, a recommendation in an evaluation report may suggest increasing the number of follow-up visits to the teacher. This suggestion may be completely inappropriate if one programme person has 300 teachers in two distant areas to visit. It may also be possible that the organisation can only afford one instead of two visits per school term. By having knowledge of the context in which the NGO operates, recommendations are more likely to be context-sensitive and thus more feasible to implement.

- *Demystification of the evaluative process for NGO staff*

External evaluation, traditionally, is characterised by an evaluator coming into the organisation, conducting the evaluation and producing a technical report without programme staff being aware why and what was evaluated. This results in programme staff feeling bewildered and alienated from the process. However, by working collaboratively with NGO staff the evaluation process is demystified. To do so it is necessary to discuss with programme staff why the evaluation is being done, how it will be done, how the findings could be used by the organisation and how their participation is crucial to the process. Also, they come to understand that evaluation need not be viewed from a negative perspective and that it is an integral part of programme development. Demystification of the evaluative process also helps in ensuring programme staff's co-operation.

- *Co-ownership of the evaluation*

When NGOs collaborate in the evaluation of their programmes, they co-own the process and with this comes a sense of responsibility to "get the best out of the process". By co-owning the process, they are crucial players in identifying and answering pertinent questions. The report and other additional products such as instruments are viewed as belonging to them. Co-ownership of the evaluation also contributes to higher levels of commitment.

- *Human capacity building in monitoring and evaluation skills*

A collaborative approach to evaluation is based on capacity development and as such it seeks to develop monitoring and evaluation skills of NGO personnel. This empowers them to become active participants in the evaluation. An added benefit is that they are able to assess some of the merits and pitfalls of external evaluations. For example, previously, NGOs accepted evaluation designs proposed by evaluators they may have commissioned without question, whereas after actively participating in evaluations with the IEQ, they are able to review designs, instrumentation and data collection procedures in a more enlightened way. Even if the NGO staff do not conduct their own programme evaluations, they have some knowledge and a skills base from which to assess whether outside evaluators are carrying out the organisation's brief. Also, they understand and appreciate the constraints that need to be considered in conducting an evaluation.

- *Evaluation is manageable and meaningful*

The involvement of NGO staff makes many aspects of the evaluative process manageable and meaningful. For example, having NGO personnel involved in data collection makes the process manageable particularly if there are vast distances to be covered, especially in rural areas. The NGO staff collecting data together with the IEQ had cost benefits both for the IEQ and the NGO. Also, the quality of data collected, especially interviews and questionnaires, was enhanced because the NGO personnel are able to speak the local language. The use of the local language also contributes to creating a relaxed and enabling environment for respondents. Although many respondents may be able to speak English, they may feel more comfortable doing an interview in their home-language. In this way the data collected are meaningful. Not all the IEQ researchers speak the local languages of all the regions in which data were collected.

- *Evaluation reports are "user-friendly"*

By working together as an evaluation team, the NGOs and the IEQ were able to interpret the results of the study from both a "technical" and a "grassroots" perspective. This allows a more comprehensive and integrated picture of the programme. Dual perspectives have the advantage of integrating theory and practice. Evaluation reports in a collaborative process are also likely to be written in a manner that is "user friendly" and thus, accessible to people who might previously have found an evaluation report full of jargon. This has positive implications for the quality of the report and any other product that comes out of it. Also, the report is used by the organisation instead of being stored as "another evaluation report."

- *Shared decision-making and responsibility*

The adoption of a collaborative approach to evaluation involves decision-making, responsibility and accountability being shared among all team members, usually at

varying degrees. All team members' knowledge and experience are recognised and respected. Shared decision making, for example, is by no means relinquishing responsibility but rather an expression of joint responsibility. This aspect of collaboration also builds capacity in dealing with not only with the technical aspects of an evaluation but also with process issues.

Challenges

There are also a number of challenges that need to be recognised and considered when using the collaborative approach to evaluation. However, it is important to note that these challenges need not impede the process; in fact, they can become opportunities!

- *Converging Diverse Skills and Experiences*

Participants in a collaborative evaluation enter the process with different knowledge and skills bases. It is important to acknowledge individual ideas, experiences and knowledge, and utilise them in a meaningful way that enriches the focus of the task, namely, the programme evaluation. In an attempt to address these divergencies, it is important to encourage co-operation among participants so that everyone can learn from each other. In this way, new skills are learned by all involved in the process.

Also, a systematic decision making strategy should be employed so that more vociferous participants are prevented from intimidating more timid ones into acquiescing without full discussion when important decisions are before the group. Good facilitation skills are called for in this situation.

- *Collaboration takes time*

The collaborative approach to evaluation can be a very time consuming process. This is particularly true if building capacity in evaluation skills is of prime importance. During the NGO/IEQ INSET evaluation, addressing NGO representatives' feelings of being under threat and instrument development were two activities that took a fair amount of time. Taking time was important to building NGO capacity rather than imposing designs and instruments.

There were occasions when the IEQ took the lead in the evaluation process because of constraints on time and other resources. An example of this was in data analysis. In such instances the delineation of tasks needs to be negotiated so that all participants are involved and each understands the other's role.

The literature on change and the change process is quite clear, however, that any type of change, and particularly complex changes such as those involved in learning and using monitoring and evaluation tools, takes time; there is no "quick fix" in human resource development (Fullan, 1993; Hall & Hord, 1987).

- *NGOs have high staff turn over*

High staff turnovers which are common in many NGOs impede the collaborative approach to evaluation because new staff frequently enter the evaluation process without appropriate research and evaluation skills. This could contribute to new individuals on the evaluation team feeling lost and thus losing interest, especially if they perceive the evaluation as being overwhelming. This could be addressed by pairing a new staff member with someone who has been involved in the process from the beginning, with an understanding that it is her responsibility to assist the new person. Also, it would be beneficial to involve more than one representative per organisation in the evaluation process.

One unintended positive outcome of the high staff turnover was that as the new provincial departments came into being in South Africa, NGO personnel were often hired in key positions, bringing their experience in monitoring and evaluation with them. This may be viewed in the long run as another form of capacity building, as the skills in monitoring and evaluation are carried over into new settings--ones which may have even more potential for affecting change in the system.

- *Unrealistic expectations*

NGO staff may have expectations that exceed what a collaborative approach to evaluation can fulfill. Thus, NGOs may perceive the capacity building in evaluation skills as being only nominal. Although they would have gained some skills, they may have expected to be able to conduct an evaluation on their own without extensive training. It should be understood from the outset that being involved in a collaborative evaluation study does not necessarily enable one to conduct an evaluation after one collaborative experience. It is very important that unrealistic expectations are not set from the perspective of both the organisation and the evaluators' perspectives.

- *Reactions to Results*

The IEQ team anticipated that there may have been negative reactions where there were poor results, creating disillusionment with the entire process. What happened instead was quite the opposite: NGOs were very self-critical. In one case, in particular, teachers with high training had lower raw classroom observation ratings than teachers with medium training. The differences were not statistically significant, and IEQ team members tried to explain to the NGO representative that there was "really no difference" between the groups. However, the NGO representative countered that the problem was that they weren't rated significantly *higher*, as this was an important aspect of their programme. Since they were not, those responsible for training immediately began to examine their programme and make plans to interview teachers about ways to strengthen this component.

- *Cost Implications*

The time-consuming nature of the collaborative process has financial implications. It can be more costly to embark on a "collaborative" one than on an "external" one. While the costs of collaboration yield a pay-off in capacity development, these costs need to be considered in planning for evaluation.

Conclusions

The work of the IEQ Project in conducting collaborative programme evaluations represents a dramatic shift away from the traditional approach to evaluation by external evaluators, toward the use of evaluation as a tool for improving programmes and making informed decisions by those involved. For many of the South Africans involved in this project, it was the first time they were involved as participants in *planning with* evaluation specialists rather than being *subjected to* evaluation scrutiny. Collaborative programme evaluation, while requiring an investment of time and money--and creative problem solving at times to make it work--has a tremendous potential payoff in terms of human resource development. For the IEQ team, sharing responsibility for planning and carrying out the evaluation studies and building the capacity of others to use evaluation were key to the success of the project.

So in the end, what changed? Perhaps the most important outcome in the long run is the new mind-set toward evaluation that became evident as participants began to view evaluation as a tool for informed decision making rather than something to fear. They now have a beginning knowledge and some experience in the use of systematic, data-based ways to monitor and evaluate their programmes and make adjustments as needed. A few examples that have come back to the IEQ team after the collaborative experience show that the impact has gone well beyond the more typical "filing of the evaluation report":

> *We're beginning a new book mobile, a circulating library made possible by a vehicle and colourful, appealing trade books donated by the Japanese government, to provide books for recreational reading to children in rural areas. But before we start, we've got to collect some data! How else will we know If it's making a difference? How much are children reading now? What are their attitudes towards reading? What are their reading levels?*
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> Training Coordinator, INSET Programme

We constructed classroom observation protocols for one of our training programmes, but we have five! We can't just evaluate one. Our teachers and trainers are working together on #2, discussing what's important to measure and how it can be measured. It won't happen overnight, but eventually we'll get all five. We have to.

Training Manager, INSET Programme

Collaborative monitoring and evaluation efforts are important on a larger scale as well. With the development and implementation of educational reform initiatives by the new democratic government comes the need to monitor and assess implementation and results at the classroom level--a process that yields important information for policy makers. From policy to practice to policy, the cycle is informed by the use of data from the classroom.

With the election of the new democratic government in South Africa, opportunities and challenges abound to implement reform initiatives through the legitimate government. The IEQ team has met with representatives of provincial and national departments of education to share findings of the impact assessment studies and the methods used in assessing the quality of classroom practices. All expressed a keen interest in the work of the IEQ and an enhanced awareness of the importance of on-going monitoring and evaluation of the impact of new educational policies and programmes at the classroom level. As reforms move forward in South Africa, it will be important to gauge the extent to which national policies and goals are making a difference at the classroom level for the intended beneficiaries--the learners.

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